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ABSTRACT

A case study of one 14-year old boy whose writing skills were falling behind those of his peers explored how a tutorial program would enhance his skills. The tutorial sessions, which occurred twice a week for one school year, followed a process approach to writing that invited the boy to brainstorm possible topics, attempt multiple drafts, edit and revise drafts, and finally to bring edited drafts to a form considered acceptable for final grading. Findings indicated first that revision for the student was at first cosmetic (correction of mechanical errors, punctuation, spelling). On several occasions the tutor modeled certain types of revision; he would write a piece in conjunction with the student and then work through his own revision process orally. The boy responded with interest and began to use some of his tutor's editing phrases: "That will have to go" or "That sentence doesn't work." Second, after three months of one-to-one tutoring, the boy's revision process showed signs of progress; it moved from cosmetic corrections to major structural and informational revisions. As he became more adept at revising, the student became increasingly aware of the necessity of significant revision. Third, the boy's revision process at the end had internalized, to some degree, the value of the writing process. Implications are that the tutorial method is ideal in teaching revision. An important part of the revision process for the boy was sharing his revisions aloud. (Two figures are included.) (TB)

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GETTING THE RIGHT MEANING WITH THE RIGHT WORDS: APPLYING ELBOW IN THE WRITER'S WORKSHOP

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Introduction:

> You can't find the right words till you know exactly what you are saying, but you can't know exactly what you are saying till you find just the right words. The consequence is that you must start by writing the wrong meaning in the wrong words; but keep writing till you got the right meaning in the right words. Only at the end will you know what you are saying (Elbow, 1973, p. 26).

This comment by Elbow (1973) aptly illustrates the problematic nature of revision for both novice and professional writers. Why should we revise? One basic reason is that schools tend to see revision as a process which makes for good writing and better thinking (Fulwiler, 1987). Students, on the other hand, view the revision process as a very mechanical process of attending to a few surface conventions (e.g., putting commas in the right place or placing a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence and a period at the end/before turning in a "good" copy (as opposed to a "rough" copy) for a grade.

The problem in many schools--from elementary classrooms through college--is the "absence of a comprehensive literate environment to encourage, reinforce, and demand good language habits, including reading and speaking as well as writing" (Fulwiler, 1987, p. 61). Students are rarely encouraged to revise more than once to a first draft. Realistically speaking, teachers may not see the need for revision beyond an initial survey of a drafted piece to look for problems that are related to conventions of proper usage in written text. A literate classroom environment would, ideally, invite students to rewrite beyond the level of correctness in terms of using appropriate conventions. In this respect, the aim would be to encourage students to rewrite in order to make what they have written clearer and to assist them in locating even stronger things to say (Fulwiler, 1987). One of the important lessons, then, is to help students to see the value of drafting beyond the stage of "writing the wrong meanings in the wrong words" as Elbow says and aim for that rewriting or revising that will enable them to "get the right meaning in the right words."

In light of the foregoing, the purpose of this research project was to examine more closely how the revision process worked for Danny (not his real name), a fourteen year old boy whose previous experiences with rewriting had been limited to producing rough copies of initial drafts and engaging in a single revision to produce what is somewhat euphemistically called a "good" copy.

Literature Review

Britton (1970) and Emig (1971) represent milestone studies of children's writing processes and of the development of the stages of writing--conception, incubation and production. Graves (1975) examined the composing processes of 7-year olds and

discovered that children who were allowed to select their won topics wrote four times as much as children in classes where teachers assigned the writing.

Graves (1981), in his examination of research related to writing, pointed out that:

> From 1955 to 1972, 68 percent of all research was concerned with what the teacher was doing in the classroom. We were so preoccupied with ourselves as teachers that only 12 percent of the studies were concerned with a look at what children did when they wrote (p. 93).

Other researchers recognized the need for examining the processes of writing that involved considerations of the context in which writing takes place rather than the method one should employ in producing a coherent text. Emig (1982), in her review of studies of the writing process, called for research into writing which would take into account the place of writing across the curriculum as well as in-depth studies of individuals as writers.

Research dealing with the writing process and children's behaviour describe the writing task variously in terms of revision behaviour, problem solving processes, monitoring and other related activities. Researchers such as Sommers (1980), Flowers and Hayes (1977), in the 1970's and 1980's, along with others confirm the importance of the process approach to writing which focuses on what students think and do as they write.

Revision (or rewriting), which Schor (1983) describes as the writer's need to invent and express relationships integral part of the writing process, is considered to be an integral part of the writing process. Murray (1989), conceptualizes the revision process as one of rethinking and major alteration. In his article "The Maker's Eye - Revising Your Own Manuscripts" he stresses the need for writers to produce a number of drafts, each saying what the author wants to say more clearly in terms of content, structure and voice. The writer's work moves progressively and holistically but "The maker's eye is never satisfied, for each word has the potential to ignite new meaning ... a piece of writing is never finished (p. 91).

Nold (1981) states that young people begin to be aware of the need for review and revision when they become aware of the audience to whom they are writing. Reviewing skills are also subject to developmental factors; that is, inexperienced writers focus on conventions and rules rather than text.

Flower, Hayes, Carey, Schriver, and Stratman (1986), in an extensive discussion of revision (1986) using a more cognitive process approach state that "... we feel that one step in understanding and teaching this art may be to translate our enlarged notion of revision into a more explicit description of the thinking processes this act requires" (p. 17).

Schor's (1983) comments on revision are particularly germane to this study. She (and her colleagues) found revision to be a process lacking in appeal and quite complex in nature. In her words, "The exasperating truth is that more time went to recopying for neatness and completeness than to any other single activity" (p. 115). Evidently the

admonitions "to be neat and to be legible carry the fervor of religion" (p. 115).

Bernhardt (1988) in his analysis of the revision process, confirmed what other researchers have discovered: that writers "make low level changes in punctuation, spelling, or grammar in their texts, without making higher level changes in such features as organization or content" (p. 266). What his research demonstrated was that, given time, students will undertake substantial revision which, in turn, will result in better writing.

Design of the Study

This research study utilized a case study approach to examining the revision processes of a fourteen year old boy. Although this is not an ethnographic study, some of the techniques of naturalistic research were employed: fieldnotes, participant observation, triangulation and interviews.

Data were gathered in a tutorial setting. One of the researchers had agreed to tutor Danny in order to assist him with his school work and to attempt to develop his ability to revise his writing. Tutoring began in September, 1991 and continued on a twice weekly basis in which Danny was tutored for approximately one hour for each session. The final sessions were held during the last week of May, 1992.

An observational and tutorial log were used to describe the events which took place during lessons. The observational log was used to track Danny's progress in the revision process while the tutorial log was employed to plan and organize our own teaching strategies. In addition, articles dealing with the revision process were examined to see if their findings had particular relevance for the instructional sessions. A double-entry format (Berthoff, 1978) was used in both logs in an attempt to be more reflective about the tutorial sessions and to make meaningful connections between the research being read and the data being collected.

The tutorial sessions followed a process approach to writing used by Graves (1983) and others. In other words, Danny was invited to brainstorm possible topics, attempt multiple drafts, edit and revise drafts, and attempt to bring edited drafts to a form considered acceptable for final grading by his teachers.

The first two months of tutorial instruction was focused on building and reinforcing aspects of writing involving mechanics (punctuation, spelling, capitalization). These were the areas indicated as deficient in standardized testing and through consultation with Danny's classroom teacher.

During the early months of the tutorial, (September to December) writing was stressed as an integral part of the instructional sessions (which included some emphasis on reading comprehension instruction). However, it was not until the early part of the new year that writing and revision became the major focus of instructio

The following research questions were generated to guide the research and to provide insights into further specific areas of research:

1. How does the revision process work? Specifically, how does it work for Danny?
2. Does Danny's revision process go from a global approach to local or vice versa? What role does the revision style play in writing?
3. Are there some generalizations about revising that Danny has internalized?

In this case study, the subject, Danny, served as the key informant. Physically, Danny presented himself as a well developed 14 year old. In his personal appearance and dress he was always well groomed and neat. Danny possessed a good sense of humour and an outgoing personality. As the tutor/student relationship developed, Danny became more relaxed and talkative. Throughout the tutorial period, Danny maintained a friendly and respectful attitude. He expressed a desire to do better academically, specifically, in the language arts. His initial comment concerning himself was "I'm not very good at reading and writing."

Apart from being active in school sports (football and wrestling), Danny was also closely involved in family oriented activities and outings. He had an excellent relationship with his family, which was apparent in the manner in which they interacted with each other. His mother and father were very supportive and involved in Danny's school work. Danny's mother, in particular, devoted time on a daily basis to helping him with his homework and in coaching him for tests and in assisting him in polishing essays or projects.

Although Danny could be considered a bright student, it would appear that during the course of his elementary education he had missed essential instruction in writing and reading skills. Consequently, his self-confidence was low. Given this background, and combined with the move to Alberta from Ontario, the school situation created an "educational shock" inasmuch as his marks plummeted and frustration increased. The tutorial program which began at the beginning of his second year in junior high school (the eighth grade), represented an attempt to deal with Danny;s frustration by providing a learning environment that was individual, personalized and rewarding. In terms of being able to revise his written work, it was clearly evident that Danny had very little knowledge of the revision process. Spelling and cosmetic considerations were the only aspects of revising Danny referred to in the work he attempted to revise at the outset of the tutorial sessions.

Research Question One

How does the revision process work? Specifically, how does it work for Danny?

Revising, in its most basic form is working with the content and style of a paper, that is, adding, deleting, subtracting or rearranging words or ideas (Sommers, 1980). Children's development in revision proceeds from cosmetic and conventional considerations through to major revisions involving movement of information, additions and exclusions (Graves, 1983). Researchers have shown that children need many opportunities to write on self selected topics in order to develop revision skills (Hink,

1985 and Murray, 1989). Murray explains revising by arguing that revising is not a step that takes place only after a piece of writing is completed but rather that revising is an integral part of every step in the writing process (Murray, 1989). Developmentally, as the writer matures, he/she is more capable of writing with increased flexibility and toward an audience (Nold, 1981).

Danny's revisions initially consisted of minor cosmetic changes to his first draft. Working in a tutorial, one to one setting, allowed the tutor to work through some of his early pieces and point out obvious problems in spelling and mechanics. As Figure 1 demonstrates, Danny's revisions consisted of correcting spelling and punctuation. After some initial attempts, Danny began to spot a few errors independently as he wrote. However, the majority of these revisions where done after the draft was complete. During this progression, Danny's self-confidence improved greatly. He began to view himself more positively.

Place Figure 1 about here

Danny soon discovered that reading the draft aloud seemed to be helpful in recognizing grammatical and structural changes. It seemed that his own voice reading his own work encouraged a greater sense of ownership and audience.

On several occasions the tutor modelled his own writing and revision process. He would write a piece in conjunction with Danny and then work through his own revision process orally. He responded with interest and, subsequently, it noted that he was using some of the same wording that the tutor had used: "That will have to go", or "That sentence doesn't work".

During the three month time period that Danny worked on the revision process, some noticeable changes soon became apparent. First, Danny's self-confidence grew. He became much more positive about his own abilities and writing in general. As a result, his work at school improved steadily. Secondly, Danny developed an enhanced awareness of the value of revision. By comparing early and more recent works he was enabled to see progress. It is noteworthy that there seemed to be a growing awareness of writing with others in mind as evidenced by his own comments. "I know what I mean but I don't know if anyone else will."

Research Question Two

Did Danny's revision process go from a global approach to local or vice versa? What role does the revision style play in writing?

When first asked about revision, Danny indicated that he always changed words and spelling first. Initially, he had few revision skills at his disposal although he had, over the course of the tutorial sessions, acquired conventional skills such as punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. He then became quite involved in making these kinds of revisions. This is what Murray (1989) called the initial scanning stage.

Danny's revision process, after three months of one-to-one tutoring, showed signs of progress toward more major structural and informational revisions. As Figure 2 shows, these revisions represented a developing maturity and flexibility. As one can see, even from this typed revision, Danny is adding, changing and deleting words rather than just correcting errors in spelling and punctuation (e.g., for for to; we were going up and down the field at the end in place of down by two points). Moreover, Danny's attempts at clarifying spelling mistakes has shown real development where he attempted variations on a word to arrive at the most likely spelling of a word (e.g., camest for comest). Flower, Hayes et al., (1986) refer to processes of Evaluation, Diagnosis and Strategy Selection when discussing local and global revisions. As this analysis shows, Danny's writing process appeared to follow local to global revisions, in a recursive manner.

Place Figure 2 about here

As Danny became more adept at revising there was a growing awareness of the need to rewrite and redraft beyond merely changing words or correcting spelling. In developing the revision and rewriting process, Danny's writing had become less focused upon his own perceptions and more on that of a potential audience for his texts.

Research Question Three

Are there some generalizations about revising that Danny had internalized?

Naturalistic research, by its very nature, relies on descriptive and reflective field notes for data (Bogdan and Bidlen, 1982). The tutorial setting is one that allows the researcher to get to know the subject very well while viewing the situation from all angles. Hence, the researcher can make observational comments from a greater depth of understanding.

Notwithstanding the advantages of the naturalistic research approach and the tutorial method, the whole question of internalized generalizations is open-ended. Internalization suggests that the subject would be able to demonstrate, at a later date, the skills acquired during the research. It would be further assumed that these same skills would be transferred to other areas of the curriculum. At this time, these questions remain unanswered. Time is the determining factor. However, it could be suggested that Danny had, in fact, internalized, to some degree, the concept of the value of revision as part of writing process. The addition of information and restructuring of sentences are Danny's strong points. At the very least, Danny has developed beyond the skill of cosmetic revision involving mechanics and spelling.

Educational Implications

This case study represented an attempt to examine how the revision process functioned in one student. Hence, implications for instruction must be tempered by the obviously limited nature of research of this kind. Nevertheless, some implications can be derived for the classroom. In the first place, a tutorial approach allows for greater individualization of instruction and, therefore, should allow teachers, parents, and aides the opportunity to work through the revision process more effectively.

Working side by side with a student allows a teacher to guide, direct, correct, and gain insights, all within a relatively short period of time. In essence, one-to-one instruction fits very nicely into Pearson's (1986) gradual release of responsibility model of instruction where, initially, the proportion of responsibility for completing tasks is the major responsibility of the teacher who must model or demonstrate what the task requirements are for effective learning. In this respect, the teacher (or tutor) provides the necessary scaffolding to ensure success on the part of the student. However, as learning proceeds, the scaffolding is gradually removed to the point where the student can independently apply what she/he has learned, for example, about revision.

There are, of course, obvious constraints at work here. A tutorial setting, while ideal for the students, is not a practical one for the teacher. What the teacher needs to do, though, is either to enlist parent aides or volunteers to assist in the one-to-one procedure and to experiment with the revision process using small groups of 3 or 4 students. Once again, variations in teaching revision to small groups are possible: small group peer conferences can be very effective (see Tompkins, 1990) as can editing teams or pairs (Fulwiler, 1987).

Revision, it must be noted, is a recursive rather than a linear process (Sommers, 1980). For Sommers, revision was defined as "a sequence of changes in composition--changes which are initiated by cues and occur continually throughout the writing of a work" (Sommers, 1980, p. 380). In Danny's case, his initial attempts at revision involved looking over the work to correct mistakes made at the surface level (i.e., errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar). In terms of Sommers (1980) four revision operations: deletion, substitution, addition, and reordering, Danny's revision processes involved the first three operations at the word level. It was only at a later time in his revising efforts that he moved beyond the surface features of words to the level where revisions made were at the level where meaning was of primary consideration. This suggests that while revision in writing should concern itself with mechanics, there is an overwhelming need to convince writers that what is being communicated must take priority over the focus on surface features of the text being communicated. Berthoff (quoted in Fulwiler, 1987) suggests that we have students revise whole paragraphs rather than individual sentences as words because "only paragraphs provide enough content and direction to guide the revision" (p. 66).

What also works is to share your writing and ask pertinent questions. What seemed to work well for Danny was to have the tutor write with him and share (out loud) the revision process. In fact, one of the key areas of improvement in revision for Danny was his ability to take on the language of his tutor as he revised his own compositions.

Concluding Statement

The revision process is an important developing or unfolding aspect of the writer's growth from fluency, to clarity, to correctness. What we learned from Danny was that the growth in the ability to revise one's own writing can be a meaningful and rewarding process. Even young writers can be taught to reach for deeper levels of understanding in their writing.

In concluding this examination of the revision process, we would add that a very valuable by-product of the research has been that as writers, we have re-examined and re-evaluated our own revision processes numerous times. We leave this article with Murray's (1989) observation:

> A piece of writing is never finished. It is delivered to a deadline, torn out of the typewriter on demand, sent off with a sense of accomplishment and shame and pride and frustration (p. 91).

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Figure 1: Typed Version of Danny's Initial Attempts at Revision

This story begens with Father Murray meeting a man naned Din. This Din charecter apeals to Father Murray although he's Irish (They didn't like Irish in those day). This Irish man asked if Father would stay in his back room. Father accepted because he could not stand nois the nosie and bootleging at his hotel.

A little While after Father Murray cane, a big police man came and got rid of sone bootleging.

Figure 2: Typed Version of Danny's Revision After Three Months

Superbowl

As my name ehcoed off the walls of the new statetom, I ran out to the applad of

team for
my tiam mates. The reff then called my name to come over to the win toss.

tossed
and w The reff through it up and,. I then called heads but when it hit the ground

it rolled around, it seemed like forever but it fell on tales its was there ball...

s going up and down
The next to quarter seemed to go fast because we were down by two points

the field but at the end they were over by two points.